

**“The Earth on Turtle’s Back”** (Onondaga)  
**“When Grizzlies Walked Upright”** (Modoc)  
**from The Navajo Origin Legend** (Navajo)  
**from The Iroquois Constitution** (Iroquois)  
**Enrichment: Native American Myths**

The need to explain how life began gave birth to myths, or traditional stories, that are passed down from generation to generation. When these stories, which are often about immortal beings, reflect the origins of earthly life, we call them origin myths. In Native American cultures, many of the myths reflect the region of North America in which people lived.

For instance, the Blackfeet tell a story about how horses came to their land. The use of horses transformed the way Plains people lived. The first documentation of Native Americans on horseback comes from northern Mexico in the late 1500s. It is likely that the use of horses spread across the Plains as the result of trading among various groups of people. With horses, the Plains people became better hunters and so raised fewer crops. Horses also changed the way Plains people waged war. Rival warriors on horseback engaged in fierce battles on the Plains.

In the Arctic, frozen seas and icy, treeless plains made for limited resources. In summer, the Inuits collected driftwood from the ocean shores to make tools and shelters and hunted caribou or fished in inland rivers and lakes. In winter, they built igloos or houses of snow and ice at a favorite spot near the sea and hunted seals. Inuit religious beliefs reflected their close ties to the natural world; they believed that each animal has a spirit.

In the Southwest, the Pueblos grew corn, beans, and squash. Their religious beliefs reflected the importance of farming. Through prayers and other rituals, they tried to please the spirits of nature, such as wind, rain, and thunder. The Hopis believe that the *kachinas* were supernatural beings who lived among the first Hopis and taught them how to live their new world. By making *kachina* dolls, the Hopis symbolize their belief in the gods (more than 250 of them) and share their beliefs with their children. The *kachinas*, then, are symbols of their faith and heritage. The characters in a *kachina* dance might represent animals, forces of nature, or even clowns.

**DIRECTIONS:** Answer the following questions on the lines provided.

1. Why do the Blackfeet tell a story about how horses came to their land?

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2. What types of origin stories did the Inuits probably tell? Why?

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3. What types of origin stories did the Pueblos probably tell? Why?

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4. What types of origin myths would a culture living on the southern coast of America most likely tell? Why?

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